

VZCZCXRO1379  
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHAR #1510/01 3330933  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 280933Z NOV 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7304  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 001510

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [GH](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: GHANA ELECTIONS: ALL THEY ARE SAYING, IS GIVE  
PEACE A CHANCE

11. SUMMARY. If Ghana's December elections somehow go awry, it won't be for lack of trying to focus the attention of the populace on peace. For the past two months, the call for peaceful elections has been omnipresent and inescapable, even drowning out discourse on political platforms and the ever-present rumor mongering by the political parties about attempts of their opponents to steal the election. Newspapers, FM radio stations, independent and government-owned television stations, civil society groups, religious leaders in churches and mosques, pop culture celebrities, sports figures, leaders of the police, military, and other security forces, politicians from President Kufuor to the presidential candidates themselves to party youth leaders -- all have joined together to publicly and forcefully insist that the real winner in this election is going to be peace. With a very few exceptions that unfortunately grab the spotlight, by overwhelming consensus Ghanaian society has embraced common cause with one issue this balloting season: let these elections be carried out peacefully. END SUMMARY.

THE MEDIA LEAD THE WAY...

12. Ghanaian media buzz with examples of a society focused on the importance of peace in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. With the exception of some reckless radio call-in programs, the media have recognized the dangers of radical or misleading reportage, and have embraced their responsibility to promote peace. Regardless of which party wins, the average Ghanaian seems to consider peace as the most important election result, and the media, guided by the National Media Commission (NMC) and its "peace angle journalism" campaign, have done much to promote this sentiment.

13. Articles, editorials and letters to the editor promoting peace appear daily in print media, including both of the nationally-distributed state-owned papers Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times. For months, the Daily Graphic has run a countdown box above its masthead with exhortative aphorisms: "16 DAYS TO GO: Peaceful elections will make Ghana's image soar higher on the international platform," or "13 DAYS TO GO: Do not be influenced by anyone to do anything that will mar the elections." These papers often dedicate multiple peace-promoting stories in a single edition, reporting on remarks by religious leaders, political leaders, NGO and community leaders, the Electoral Commission (always calming the waters by asserting that it is in control and ready to conduct free and fair elections), and the military and police responsible for security on polling day (always declaring their readiness and ability to quell any potential disturbances). Although independent, party-backed newspapers continue to run sensational and sometimes inflammatory headlines, their circulation is limited and their credibility recognized as negligible on this issue. The general tenor of the print media, much of which is read on radio and television programs, is one of introspection, urging fellow

journalists to fulfill their role of responsible reportage to ensure a peaceful public response to the election.

¶4. Television does not play as heated a role as radio and print in affecting the mood of the general public, but most stations devote a significant amount of time to election coverage. Although government-owned television is required to devote equal time to all candidates, the most universal complaint with regard to coverage is one of fairness. Images of rallies, for example, do not always accurately reflect the actual number of supporters present. Candidates can purchase time on television, and the NPP's Nana Akufo-Addo has significantly outspent other candidates in this medium. While television broadcasts generally trend toward the promotion of peace, there have been instances of partisan drama on live TV, such as when the conversation on one political analysis program grew so heated that the host of the show could no longer moderate. The program was abruptly pulled off the air as participants accused each other of prostitution and pedophilia. One participant, a professor at a communications school, was sacked over the incident. The two were invited back to the program later to apologize and make public amends. On another occasion, Tony Aidoo, a leading NDC economic advisor, walked out on the live show "Good Evening Ghana," accusing the NPP's panelist, Kwaku Kwarteng, of lacking sufficient stature in his party. "I am here to debate policy makers, and not their messengers," he said, removing his microphone and walking off the set. The National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) has paid for advertising spots on all TV stations asking Ghanaians with different political backgrounds to live in peace, promoting the slogan "unity in diversity."

ACCRA 00001510 002 OF 003

¶5. While FM radio stations have joined in the steady drumbeat for peace, their talk radio call-in programs frequently degenerate into inflammatory factional rhetoric. Akan language call-in programs appear to be the worst offenders, with callers making inappropriate partisan statements that incite angry responses, announcers allowing provocative comments to go unchecked, and non-incendiary English statements being translated into inflammatory proverbs or expressions. Even well-intentioned stations are caught off guard, allowing provocative remarks to slip by and later apologizing. (NOTE: Embassy Public Affairs Section donated tape-delay equipment to 10 radio stations around Ghana last year; all but three of those stations are still going live with no delay. END NOTE)

¶6. Intermittent monitoring of Accra radio stations has turned up little first-hand evidence of regular, purposeful, and malicious abuse of talk radio, however media experts, news articles, and casual observers consistently note the prevalence of this practice. Senior editors, journalists, and at least one Fubright scholar contend that the situation is more pronounced outside Accra. Many phone calls are from "serial callers," often paid party supporters who call in to harangue the opposing party. They are often recognizable by voice, and even sport nicknames such as "Yellowman" and "Mummo" (NOTE: Mummo is a nickname used to impugn the intelligence of President Kufuor. END NOTE) The level of credibility afforded their statements is hard to gauge, but there is no doubting the entertainment value for Ghanaians stuck in tedious traffic, many of whom have become addicted to talk radio shows.

¶7. Two recent examples point to a burgeoning attempt to professionalize talk radio, and a general desire by the media to monitor itself. In the first, an NDC Member of Parliament on an Accra station declared that the ban on firearms at polling stations did not extend to registered firearms. He further stated that any person whose name is not on the voter register should be prevented from voting -- by force if necessary. Although protocol demanded a degree of deference to the MP, the announcer did attempt to correct his

statements. Radio and print media caught on to the story, however, and immediately published articles and editorials to counter his incorrect comments, lambaste the MP, and allow the Electoral Commission the public space to set the record straight. In the second instance of journalists policing themselves, an Accra station with national coverage has moved away from taking phone calls, choosing instead to take text messages and e-mails from the public, a practice which allows more control over the conversation.

...AND THE CITIZENS FOLLOW

18. Beyond media efforts to advance peace, civic organizations, NGOs, and think tanks have been putting together an endless series of forums devoted to educating the public on acceptable behavior at the polling place, inviting members of the Electoral Commission to speak about the transparency of the process, and urging voters to accept election results. Much of this has been funded by Development Partners and overseas NGOs. The British High Commission sponsored two presidential debates. At the end of the second debate, all four candidates stood, held hands, and made a pledge for peace. The NCCE has been traveling throughout Ghana with a voter education project, explaining the voting process and showing a video. When Poloff asked what the video was, they replied "Hotel Rwanda." With World Bank funding, some of Ghana's most accomplished musicians came together a la "We are the World" to produce "Ghana First: We Want Peace," a beautiful piece of pop music that addresses the upcoming elections and is being played almost constantly on Ghana's FM stations. Joy FM, one of Accra's most popular stations, is sponsoring an "American Idol" style competition for original music promoting peaceful elections.

19. On November 14, Ghana's Vice President Aliu Mahama supervised the destruction of more than 700 small arms and weapons, and used the occasion to refer to the need for peaceful elections. "After the December 7 general election," he said, "life will still go on, children will continue to go to school, market women will go to the market, workers will go to their workplaces, and this beloved country of ours will still be Ghana, the beacon of hope for Africa." On November 16-18, the Ghana Armed Forces ran a series of exercises to prepare for the provision of security during the elections that almost appeared to be more public relations than maneuvers. Monday morning headlines trumpeted the success of the weekend drills and the preparedness of the various

ACCRA 00001510 003 OF 003

security forces to assure a tranquil day of polling on all fronts.

110. On November 19, before an international soccer match with Tunisia, Ghana's national team, the Black Stars, came on to the field not in their usual colorful jerseys, but in white shirts emblazoned with the words "Peaceful Elections." The National Union of Ghana Students opened a crusade to educate students on the need for violence-free elections. Businesses have begun to use peaceful elections for public service advertising. One firm launched an essay competition with the theme of "Violence-Free Ghana." On November 20, Poloff met with a "focus group" of seven younger (up to mid-30s) Muslim business and community leaders in Nima, one of Accra's densely settled low income neighborhoods. Nima has in the past been an NDC stronghold, but three parties were represented in the group. The conversation was freewheeling, and none of the participants was shy about extolling the virtues of his party. However, they all agreed that a peaceful election was critical for Ghana and its economic development. The participants described community events, such as peace walks and the preaching of messages of peace in the mosque and churches. Embassy local staff tell us that peaceful elections have been a leit motif in Sunday sermons and Friday messages in the mosque. At Accra's Catholic Church, parishoners are urged to support peaceful elections by doing five decades on the rosary every day.

Most churches have cancelled services on election day (a Sunday), and have urged their flocks to return directly home after voting and to stay off of the streets.

¶11. Not a single day has gone by in the past several months without a walk for peace, a rally for peace, a forum to discuss peaceful elections, an ecumenical council to pray for peace, a concert for peace, a soccer match for peace -- Ghana is mad for peace! Get in a taxi or go to a market, and when you ask about the elections, the answer is invariably, "We are just praying for peace." Most Ghanaians have a strong opinion about which party they favor, but except for the most rabid partisans, peace trumps even an election victory. There is little doubt that this state of mind is the result of an underlying fear of the instability that might be fostered by violence or a contested or inconclusive election.

But in the overall context of African nations, Ghana is a peaceful country and Ghanaians tend to be a peaceful people. This country has not known violent revolution or civil war. While no one can predict peaceful elections with total certainty, and isolated instances of violence on election day might even be expected, the desire for peace among the people of Ghana is genuine. If a disgruntled losing party decides to take its beef out on the street, it seems very unlikely that the masses would follow.

TEITELBAUM